

Government Orders

ployment insurance will have on the various regions of Quebec and Canada over the next two years.

I have quoted these statistics on several occasions in this House, Mr. Speaker, but they are at the heart of this bill. In fiscal years 1995-96 and 1996-97, cuts in that area alone will total \$630 million in Atlantic Canada and \$735 million in Quebec. Is that what Canadians have to hope for?

This means that together Atlantic Canada and Quebec will bear 60 per cent of the cuts, while only one third of the total population of Canada lives in these two regions. The situation is even worse in the case of Atlantic Canada. That region alone bears 26 per cent of the cuts, with only 8.5 per cent of the population.

Besides the Bloc Québécois, who has risen in this House and denounced loudly the fact that the Maritime or Atlantic provinces are made to pay the largest share? The other side may refuse to hear, but we did point this out. We have not heard the hon. members from Western Canada complain about how hard Maritime workers were hit either. We, from the Bloc Québécois, are the ones who have made this regional disparity public. It was no big secret and it should not be, but the information had to be leaked out just the same. Then, the government was forced to provide explanations.

I am pointing out for the first time in this House the extent to which the Maritimes and Quebec are indeed targeted by these cuts. Why is that? Just because they raise UI eligibility requirements from 10 to 12 weeks. Is the effect achieved a surprise? No, Mr. Speaker. If we in this House could show the very nice charts compiled by Employment and Immigration Canada, the people watching us would see that the great majority of UI recipients with short periods of employment are in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces. It is known fact.

More surprisingly, it is even a known fact that the number of recipients with 8 to 19 weeks of insurable employment fell from 610,000 in 1975 to 250,000 in 1990.

• (1100)

This means that when we "improved" unemployment insurance, recipients generally had a short period of employment behind them. Since that time, however, the number of unemployed people with a long history of employment has increased. That is no reason to reduce benefits for those unable to find longer-term jobs in their local economy, as I will demonstrate.

In a document based on the data available, Employment and Immigration Canada tried to predict how many people would be affected by the fact that, in these regions where seasonal employment is very important, the minimum number of weeks of work required to qualify for UI will be increased from 10 to 12. So how many Canadians will be affected by this provision, according to Employment and Immigration Canada's forecasts

which are likely very conservative. Forty-four thousand people. Where are these 44,000 people? Newfoundland, 16,000; Prince Edward Island, 2,960; Nova Scotia, 3,575; New Brunswick, 11,535; Quebec, 8,000.

Of course, some may find it strange that people cannot find longer-term jobs. It may be strange that the East has a different economic structure but history explains it. However, so far, Canada's unemployment insurance has taken these different economic structures into account. And I could go on, Mr. Speaker. How many will be affected in Ontario? In all of Ontario, how many will be affected? That is an interesting question. We could hold a lottery with that. According to Employment and Immigration Canada's estimates, 305.

How many will be affected in Manitoba? Two hundred and five. This is 205 too many. In Saskatchewan? Zero. Alberta is also a winner: zero. In British Columbia? Eight hundred and fifteen.

These figures are telling. Why have UI cuts been made in this fashion? The government wilfully targeted those who live in an economy based on seasonal employment and who try to survive by doing odd jobs. These are economies where, unlike in Ontario, there are fewer good jobs, that is permanent jobs. This is the truth. Perhaps those who drafted this legislation do not realize that it is not out of laziness, carelessness or contempt that a very large number of Canadians have short-term jobs which, from time to time, force them to rely on UI benefits, never knowing if they will be able to find another job the following year. Well, now these people know; they know that they will not be able to work next year.

According to this very interesting study, the number of those people who will eventually have to go on welfare is not known. Yet, social assistance estimates for provinces are established on that basis.

• (1105)

There are two other types of cuts which will particularly affect people who use up their UI benefits. Again, the big losers will be those living in eastern provinces.

Some, including members of this House, may laugh. Let me tell them what Alain Dubuc wrote. Mr. Dubuc is an editorial writer in *La Presse*, an economist by training, and he is certainly not a spokesperson for community groups. He wrote: "Axworthy is making a mistake—", the expression hon. minister is missing because this is a quote, "—because he is cutting before helping. I too deplore the fact that so many people, in Quebec and in Canada, have to rely on that program. But it is a mistake to think that we will succeed by depriving them of UI benefits, without programs and a policy to give them hope of finding work—". We can talk about hope but in reality there is more